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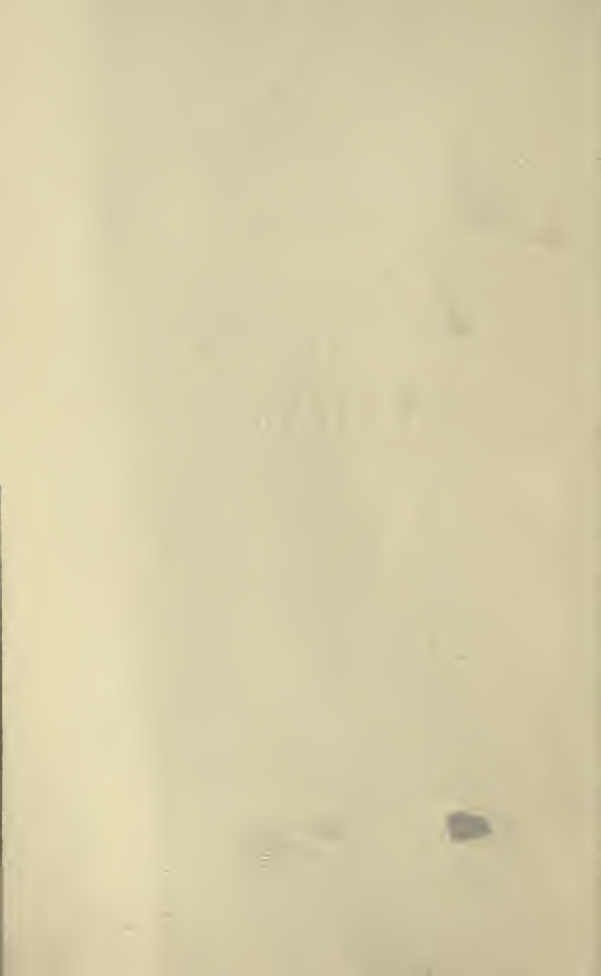


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ISAIAH

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BY

ELISABETH WOODBRIDGE

Morris

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ISAIAH

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963

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ISAIAH the Prophet sat in his study, alone, submerged in profoundest meditation. Near him, on a little old table, lay a pen, half hidden under loose sheets of paper covered with writing in a large, swift hand. It was the manuscript of a new prophecy—the greatest prophecy Isaiah had ever had revealed to him—so great that the pen faltered as he wrote—faltered and fell from his hand—so great that at last it had swept him up into its own realm, a realm outside time and space and the temporary conditions of this life.

The stillness was intense.

It was broken by the sharp cry of

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a newsboy in the street, calling an extra. Isaiah stirred, drew himself together, saw the sheets of manuscript and the little black pen. He took it up and bent once more to write, but paused again as the hoarse child-voice cut into his consciousness like a sharp edge of paper cutting the flesh: "Ex-try-paper! Ex-try-paper!" The pen hung in his fingers.

Rap! Rap! Rap! A brisk, sharp knock at his door. Before he could respond, it opened to admit a young man, all energy, clean good looks, and cheerfulness—very much like the young men in the advertisements of a new brand of collars. His keen young eyes met with frank cordiality the prophet's hesitant, almost dazed ones.

"I came right in, sir. I knew you would see me. You don't mind? Oh, I interrupted you! You were writing.

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I will wait. No, don't move! My time is worth nothing compared to yours. Go right on, sir, please! And anyhow, I have some notes to write up, so we shall neither of us be wasting our time. I'll sit over here and you can speak to me when you come to a good place to stop."

The old prophet moved uneasily in his big chair, half turned to speak, and settled back once more. He reached for his pen and drew towards him a half-written sheet, on which were the words:

"the valley of vision...they shall behold a land that reacheth afar, a place of broad rivers and streams..."

The pen began to make slow lines across the page. The old hand moved as though without guidance and the old eyes were dreamy, but the lines

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as they grew, sketched in the long curves and swift peaks of a range of great mountains.

In the corner of the room the young man's pen scratched briskly, and every few moments he tore off a sheet of his pad with a gesture as crisp as the sound it made.

Finally Isaiah pushed back his chair and half turned—

“I think—perhaps—” he began.

Instantly the young man was all attention. He tucked his notes in one pocket, his pen in another, and drew his chair about so that he faced the prophet.

“Thank you, sir. I hope I didn't hurry you! I don't want to take a moment of your time unnecessarily—time is the most valuable thing in the world, of course—we've learned *that*. In fact, sir, that's the very thing I've come to you to talk about. The

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fact is, we want to help you save time. We want, that is, to help you use your time in the best way—to make it tell! We want to make *you* tell, sir, and we know we can do it. Is that clear, sir?"

"Very clear—oh, very," murmured the old man.

"Thank you, sir. Now let me show you our whole plan. You see it's this way: I represent a new system—a new philosophy, I may say. Do you mind a bit of philosophy, sir? Will it bore you? You see it's this, in a nutshell: Here's the world—it's a big world—lots of people—big distances. And here's supply—values—big values—and there's demand. And between supply and demand, there's transportation. There's your problem—that's all there is to it. Now, sir, the queer thing is, nobody has ever developed the middle term,

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transportation. We, sir, represent that middle term. Do you get me?"

The old hand made a benevolent gesture.

"You are very good, sir. Now, let's take it, say, in apples. People all over want apples. And there *are* apples, lots of them; but the game is to get them to the people that want them. We know how.

"But apples are too easy. People want other things besides apples. You, sir, have got something they want just as much as they want apples—maybe more. Anyhow, they do want it. And here you sit, sir, in this little hole. You see my point, of course, or you will if you just keep in mind that I represent transportation.

"I propose to handle your—dope (we use short cuts in language, sir, as in other ways) as I would handle apples. I don't mean, of course, in

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exactly the same *way*. Our system is flexible—nothing cast-iron about us, or we'd go to the wall in a week. We meet each problem by itself. We handle apples in terms of pickers and crates and trucks and distribution centers, and, of course, advertisement. We handle you, your product, sir, in terms of stenographers and dictaphones and secretaries, and, of course, advertisement—advertisement is the common term in every answer to every problem.

“Well, there you are! We simply put you on the map—in fact, we put you all over the map. At your end we make absolutely no change. We may give you a better place to work,” the young man smiled. “But you go on practically as you have been doing. Only instead of one hand and one pen and one sheet of paper, we give you a thousand hands and a

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thousand pens and a billion sheets of paper."

Isaiah sat at a big, roll-top desk in a well-lighted office, behind glass doors marked PRIVATE. Across his silver hair shone the pale light of a winter day, dimmed somewhat by looming skyscrapers. The old man sat with a fountain pen in his hand. Beside him was a telephone and a dictaphone. Every now and then he ran his fingers through his hair with a vague movement that yet suggested hurry.

Next this office was another, also well lighted, also supplied with a roll-top desk, a telephone, and a dictaphone. Here sat the young man who represented transportation. His glass door was marked "Secretary's

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Office," and outside it was yet another office, much larger, from which the continuous click of typewriters penetrated stridently. It reached, dimly, even the inner room where the prophet sat.

The telephone rang sharply in both rooms at once. Isaiah started, and gripped the arms of his chair. The young man took down the receiver.

"Hello!....Yes, sir. His secretary speaking. Yes.... Yes....I understand....I see.... February 17 or 19, you said?...He is free on the seventeenth. What sort of audience is it?...I get you. And how large?... Well, *about* how large?... Can't you give a guess?... Not more than fifty? I understand.... Oh, yes, of course, only I'm afraid he couldn't consider giving up a date for that. We aren't booking him for an audi-

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ence of less than five hundred. You see, everybody wants him, and it simply isn't good economy to go to a handful of people, when there's another crowd of five hundred or a thousand or two thousand demanding him. You understand, I'm sure. . . . Yes, of course, I'm sure they're earnest, but so's everybody—we're all earnest. Look here, tell your bunch to get in touch with the 'Y.M.' and pick up a date there when they can hear him. All they have to do is to pay their dollar, and they get all the notices. I can tell *you*, though it hasn't been announced yet, we're just closing with them for a big thing—a series. . . . All right. And you understand, I'm sure, it's purely a matter of economizing everybody's time and energy—above all, the Chief's. Good-bye."

He hung up, and plunged into the

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opening of letters that lay in a pile in front of him. The telephone rang again.

“Hello!...Oh! Good morning, Plimpton, how's business?...That's good, so's ours. We simply can't handle it all. Well, now about that course—we're ready to close for it as per my letter of yesterday. By the way, what are you going to call it?... Good! I'll make a note of it (writing) 'Condensed Course in Prophecy'—good title. Then that's settled. Of course you know that we're letting him do it on the understanding that it's to be something really constructive—you get me? We want you to guarantee at least five hundred young men, pledged to the complete course....Seven weeks, yes....No, we can't cut that....No, the Chief wouldn't consider it. Sorry, but you see, he began by wanting three

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years, and then I went over the whole thing with him, and he's going to try this. It's a sort of compromise. I'm taking over part of the work myself—all the preliminaries, you know, voice-training, platform manner, material, background—all that sort of thing. We've got to save the Chief all we can—he's showing the strain a bit. . . . Oh, no, he's all right. Well, then, you'll attend to the pledges. They're supposed to do six months' field work after the course, you understand, and then return for a two weeks' institute next winter. You see, there simply isn't enough of the Chief to go round—we've got to make more of him somehow. Good-bye."

Again he fell upon his letters; again the telephone rang.

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"Hello! Yes, speaking. . . . No, but I can talk for him, it all goes through me. . . . Talk away. . . . What syndicate? . . . Oh, the press—. . . . I see." The young man's tone grew mellow with genuine respect. "I suppose you cover the whole country pretty well. . . . Yes, I know. Any foreign sheets? . . . I see. *Not* bad. Well, come up and talk to me, or I'll come to you. . . . Just as you say. I'll be right here for an hour. I'll tell 'em to send you in. Arbuckle, you said the name was. . . . All right, good-bye."

He hung up, pushed a button beside him, took down the receiver again: "Miss Brown: Man named Arbuckle is coming in to see me in about ten minutes. Send him right up. Thank you." He got up, quietly closed the door into the inner office, and returned to his desk and his letters.

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A few minutes later there was a knock, the door opened, and a woman's voice announced, "Mr. Arbuckle, sir." The young secretary rose. "Arbuckle, glad to see you! My name's Smith. Sit down. Now—we're both busy, let's cut formalities. What's your idea?"

The visitor was young, rather plump, but every bit as crisp as the secretary, and no time was lost.

"I doped it out to you over the 'phone. We want your stuff—place it in our papers—syndicate it—send it all over."

"What's your notion—I mean, as to the form?"

"Oh, as to form—it's nothing new—take a corner—always the same corner; get a title—always the same title—same print—same everything, you know, so it's easy to find—

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like 'Beauty Chats' or 'Daddy's Good Night Stories.'"

"Got your title?"

"Oh, that's easy: 'The Prophet's Corner,' 'The Cave of the Prophet'—something crisp and striking—our publicity men will attend to that. We'll get your stuff across, I'll guarantee that. Your Chief'll be in touch with every county in the country and a lot of places outside, if you'll manage him."

"Hold up! There are the publishers to consider. He's under contract for a book, to come out just before next year's Lent—we can't get in wrong there—"

"All right. We'll fix that. Let your lawyer and our lawyer go over the thing, and give us some stuff not covered in the contract. We don't care—it all goes—the public wants it—they'll lap it up."

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"He's going to give a seven weeks' course at the 'Y.'"

"Right-o! Give us that."

"What shape?"

"Any shape. We've got men who can fix it—they'll dope it out in just the style we want—size—shape—everything—give it to us in any old shape—notes—anything—"

"I'm afraid I can't give you a thing until the course begins—the Chief's awfully temperamental, you know, in some ways—we can't yet get him to give out his stuff beforehand—he says he doesn't know what he's going to say! I used to worry about it, frankly, but I don't any more—he always gets something across that people want."

"I know. That's the way they are sometimes. We'll fix it. Have a dictaphone—sort it out afterwards—"

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dead easy—just give us the rights. Now about the business end—”

“Talk to our lawyer about all that. I don’t touch it. I manage the Chief—that’s my job.”

“Some job!” The visitor rose smiling.

“Good job, all right. Nothing wrong with the Chief, except that there’s only one of him.”

“We’ll fix that for you. We’ll run him through our machine and make five billion of him.”

“Sounds all right to me.”

“It is all right. Now about your lawyer.”

“They’ll fix you up out in the outer office. Wait a moment.” He stepped to his desk, pushed the button, took down the receiver: “Miss Brown, put Mr. Arbuckle in touch with our Mr. Hendricks, will you?”

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Thank you." He turned to Arbuckle. "That's all right. Miss Brown will take care of you. Good morning."

It was April. The big outer office was busier than ever. The brisk clicking of the typewriters was almost incessant, like locusts in August. Rain sheeted the windows and the electric lights were turned on. In the secretary's office a second telephone had been installed, and a slim young fellow sat by it, taking messages, jotting down memoranda and going over mail matter.

The big desk of the chief secretary was vacant. He himself was in the inner office, a sheaf of memoranda between his fingers, his keen young eyes bent on the old figure outlined against the big window. In here it was quiet enough so that the rain gusts could be faintly heard as they

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beat against the heavy pane. Beyond, through the luminous rain mist, the giant buildings showed dimly, gray creatures looming in a pearl-gray world.

The young man spoke with his usual brisk deference, tinged perhaps ever so faintly with irritation.

"You see, sir, they're all waiting—and they do hate to wait—they like to get everything planned definitely—we all do—allowing a margin, of course, for accident—the human equation—all that. Now, I was wondering whether it wouldn't be a good plan to turn in young Hitchcock on that book of yours—you know Hitchcock—he was the best man you had in that course—and already we are hearing from his field work—he simply eats work, that fellow. Well—I was wondering—he could take that whole job pretty well off your

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hands—it would relieve you and relieve the publishers. Of course they'd want your name, but he'd do the work. He can, I think. It would be his first big job, and a man always puts his back into his first job. I've written this letter, outlining the proposition, and if you'll be good enough to look it over—here—these are the salient points—there—and there—and then if you'll just sign there—thank you, sir. Of course they may raise a kick, but I don't believe they will—and it'll make a difference in the financial arrangements, but you aren't interested in that. Now let me see—what else? Oh, yes, sir—there's this committee. I'm sorry, but they insist on seeing you personally—and it seemed like a big opening—they represent seventeen different denominations, you see. I made them come to you, of course.

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They're coming this noon. I'll be here to see it through and take notes." He ran over his papers with deft fingers. "And then there's—no—nothing else now. You'll have two hours to yourself before the committee comes. I'm off, but I'll be back in good time.

He paused at the door: "Oh, by the way, I ordered your luncheon sent in. You oughtn't to go out. It's a gale, besides the rain—blow you right into eternity." He went out, closing the door, and handed his memoranda to the young assistant. "Go over these, will you, Grayson, and this letter—you'd better take it over yourself. And a committee comes at twelve. I'll be back. And meanwhile," he pointed toward the inner office, "keep everybody *off his neck*."

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He strode out through the main office, stopping here and there to speak to one of the stenographers and glance over their material. Ten minutes later his assistant went out.

In the inner office, behind the glass door marked PRIVATE, it was very still. The figure at the big desk did not move, except that now and then the old hand passed slowly over the white hair. At length he rose, went to the window and raised it. A gust of rain-laden wind swept in, tossed his hair, and rustled the papers on the desk. He wandered back, sat down again, took up his pen, and began to write; but his eyes seemed not to see the page. As his hand paused, the wind blew the sheet away into a corner. Oblivious, he went on writing on the sheet below. Again the sheet was blown to the floor, again the old hand wrote on.

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Finally the hand paused, the pen dropped, the prophet rose and stood, turning his face full to the gray sky.

In the secretary's office the telephone was ringing sharply. It fell silent, then resumed its insistent clamor. Outside in the great main office, the clicking typewriters clicked on. Suddenly the glass door of the private office slammed with a crash, and the girl at the nearest telephone started: "Gee! *Some* wind!" she snapped. "It's a wonder they wouldn't shut their own doors!"

At eleven the assistant returned; at 11:45, the secretary. At 11:55, the first committeeman was announced. The secretary knocked on the inner door, knocked again, turned the handle and opened it. A gust of raw wind tumbled his hair, the papers on floor and desk whirled and eddied,

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and one flew out past him and was caught by Grayson. The young man closed the door and stepped back into his office. "How about it, Grayson? When did the Chief go?"

"Isn't he there? Must have gone while I was out with that letter. I've got a report on that—"

"Never mind now. Ask Miss Brown if she knows anything about him—I certainly made it clear about the meeting—and tell her to send them all into the committee room—I'll meet them myself—darned queer—the old fellow looked as if you couldn't pry him out—and I was having his lunch sent in—well—get that word to Miss Brown."

He reopened the inner door. Again a whirl of papers. He dashed across and closed the window, mopped his rain-misted face with his handkerchief, turned and surveyed the little

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office. Grayson reappeared in the doorway.

"Leave everything just as it is, Grayson—he'll be back, of course. I've got to handle that committee—darned queer!"

THREE days later, the secretary and young Grayson stood together in the inner office. The sheets of paper still lay where the wind had blown them that stormy day.

The telephone rang. The secretary took it up and talked, standing: "Yes, speaking—I see—well, now, I'll tell you—the Chief isn't here just now—No, I can't book him at present.... No, I can't make a statement.... But here's what—you can have Hitchcock—a man he's trained, you know.... Sure he is—he's all *right*

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....*All* right....Yes, the twenty-first, your regular time—same place
....yes....Now see here, don't you worry, Hitchcock puts up a mighty good talk—you put up the publicity on it and he'll put up the talk—I'm backing him....All right, good-bye."

He set down the telephone and stood, his feet apart, his hands in his pockets. "Do you know, Grayson—in some ways—in a good many ways—I could run this outfit better—give more real satisfaction all round, you know—without the old Chief than I can with him. You see, I've always believed in making allowance for the human equation and all that—you've got to, of course—up to a certain point. But if it goes beyond that point, you simply can't handle it—at least our system can't—I don't know any system that can.

He looked about him at the pa-

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pers. "Well, we might as well pick these up—we may get an idea what was in the old fellow's mind. Queer! Just a sentence or two on each sheet! Here's this, for instance: 'the nations that rush like the rushing of many waters; but he shall rebuke them—' That's all it says! Here's another: 'and from the hard service wherein thou hast made me serve'—it stops right there!"

"Here's more," said Grayson, pulling a sheet out from its lodgement behind the desk and glancing over it, "but it hasn't any connection with yours: 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.'"

"Seems as if I'd heard that before," said the secretary.

"Probably in his lectures," said Grayson.

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"In that case, Hitchcock's got it all in his notes—he's got the whole thing systematized. Here now, listen to this: 'Woe unto them that rely on horses and trust in chariots—for their horses are flesh and not spirit.' Well, that gets me, I admit. What do you suppose he meant by that? And here's a whole bunch. Listen to this: 'Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not?' Great guns, it's hot in here now the sun's come out!" He laid down the loose sheets and flung up the window. A gust of April wind swept in, eddied about the little room, whirled the loose sheets on the desk round and round, then sucked them out through the open window. The two young men stood watching them, fascinated, as they floated higher and higher among the tall buildings.

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"See 'em go! They look like white birds," said Grayson. The other turned and looked at the bare desk. "That wind did the business all right," he said cheerfully. "Hitchcock won't even have to clean house when he comes in. Come, Grayson, we've got to get down to work."

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